

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS FINAL REPORT



**Age Action
2026**

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Summary information

liV host organisation	Volunteer Now
Assessment date(s)	9 th , 10 th & 12 th March 2026

Assessor	Paul Dinsmore
Name of lead assessor	Sandra Adair
New assessment/renewal	1st Renewal
Assessment outcome	Met

About the organisation

Age Action is the leading advocate organisation for older people in Ireland. Since 1992 it has been working to create change by building an inclusive and age-positive society. The organisation's vision is 'A society that enables all older people to participate and to live full, independent lives' with its mission being 'To achieve fundamental change in the lives of all older people by empowering them to live full lives as actively engaged citizens and to secure their rights to comprehensive, high-quality services according to their changing needs'.

Age Action's advocacy and policy work is grounded in the lived experience of growing older, and it works with Government and other bodies to influence public policy on behalf of older people. The organisation's pursuit of equality and human rights is underpinned by its work to promote ageing in place, life-long learning, health and wellbeing for older people and empowering them to live as active citizens. Volunteers play a key part in helping Age Action deliver its vision for the future of older people in Ireland and have a role in advocating against ageism to support the organisation's mission and goals. There are two core volunteer-involving programmes operated by Age Action – Getting Started and Care and Repair.

Getting Started is part of Age Action's fight against digital exclusion. It offers free, one-to-one volunteer-led training in digital literacy by supporting older people to get online or use their smart device with confidence. Volunteers support learners over five weekly classes in local libraries and community venues. The Care and Repair service supports older by helping them to live in their own homes in increased safety and comfort. Volunteers carry out small DIY jobs free of charge to help older people maintain their homes and their independence.

Last year the organisation supported 5,244 older people, completed 3,390 Care and Repair jobs, supported 831 learners on their digital journey, dealt with 1,715 queries through its information line and had 886 features on ageism and older people.

Age Action is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. The Board of Directors is responsible for the overall governance and strategic direction of the organisation. The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for operational management, supported by the Senior Leadership Team. Age Action employs a team of 40 staff, and 416 volunteers support the Getting Started and Care and Repair programmes. Responsibility for the recruitment, support and management of volunteers lies with the National Volunteer Manager.

Since its first accreditation in 2023, Age Action has continued to review its policies, procedures and practices to manage and support its volunteering programme. A Volunteer Committee has been established, Volunteer Monthly Meetings on Zoom have been introduced and a Volunteer Spotlight initiative launched to recognise and celebrate the contribution volunteers make to the organisation. In addition, a Volunteer Equality Monitoring Survey has been introduced to enable the organisation to better understand and respond to the diversity and experiences of its volunteers. In October 2024 Age Action opened a new Galway Community Hub in Galway City.

How the organisation was assessed

The assessment took place over three days and involved interviews with a Board Member, 5 staff and 40 volunteers. Face-to-face interviews by Zoom were carried out with a Board Member, the Chief Executive Officer, the Head of Programmes, the National Volunteer Manager and two Development Officers. Face-to-face interviews by Zoom were carried out with 37 volunteers, 22 of which were one-to-one and 15 volunteers across six group interviews. Telephone interviews were carried out with 3 volunteers. The organisation supplied a list of 416 volunteers from which 40 were selected all of whom were involved as Getting Started Digital Skills Tutors or Care and Repair Volunteers. The selection represented the diversity of Age Action's volunteering team and included long-serving and recently recruited volunteers.

The National Volunteer Manager and Development Officers work directly with volunteers in management and support roles. The Chief Executive Officer and Head of Programmes have leadership and operational roles in Age Action and do not have a direct volunteer management role.

NUMBER OF SITES, BRANCHES, LOCATIONS:	3
NUMBER INCLUDED IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE:	3
NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS:	416
NUMBER INTERVIEWED:	40
NUMBER AS % OF TOTAL:	9.6%
NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER ROLES:	2
NUMBER OF ROLES SAMPLED BY INTERVIEW:	2
NUMBER AS % OF TOTAL:	100
NUMBER OF STAFF:	40
NUMBER INTERVIEWED:	5
WERE TRUSTEES INTERVIEWED?	Yes

Written evidence

Self-Assessment: Volunteer Policy, Volunteer Survey Feedback Report and Volunteer Flowcharts

Assessment: Annual Report 2024, Volunteer Inclusion Statement and Volunteer Support and Supervision Policy

Meeting the standard

Quality area 1: Vision for volunteering

Volunteering is embedded within the overall vision, values, culture and aims of the organisation and its impact is recognised and communicated. Organisations understand why they involve volunteers

Practice		Met
1.1	Volunteering is planned and reviewed in line with the organisation's vision, strategy, and values	Yes
1.2	Volunteering is valued as part of the culture of the organisation and the benefits of volunteering are understood and communicated	Yes
1.3	The impact of volunteering in contributing to organisation aims is understood and communicated	Yes
1.4	Volunteer involvement is reflected in management, financial and resource planning	Yes

Volunteering is included within Age Action's Strategic Plan 2024-2026 under two of its six strategic goals – Grow Support to 'Provide a range of options for the involvement of supporters through volunteering, advocacy and fundraising' and Prioritise Good Governance to 'Support a values-led organisational culture which maintains a skilled, diverse, and engaged body of staff and volunteers'.

The Board Member and staff talked about the value that volunteers bring to the organisation, "Volunteering is reflected in the strategic plan. There is a widespread acknowledgement of their contribution to Age Action's work". "We rely on volunteers; it wouldn't be possible to do what we do without them". "They do the smaller important jobs; we couldn't operate without them. They are our eyes and ears in the community". "We look for ways to involve older people in the organisation. There is a natural reason why Age Action should involve volunteers. We always want to engage with volunteers, it's how we keep generations integral to the work of the organisation". "Volunteers bring heart to the programmes, and we couldn't do it without them". "It specifically allows the organisation to make direct links with the communities that we support". "They bring much more knowledge of what is happening in the community". "Age Action is a value-led organisation and volunteering is very much in line with our values". "The volunteers are amazing. It's great to see how they build relationships with people. They are amazing at reassuring people and take it at the pace that they want to learn. They are very patient and make everyone feel at ease".

Getting Started Volunteers highlighted how they felt they were making an impact through their volunteering, "You go through with the learner at their pace. It gives them confidence and it's a social thing as well". "The learners want to know how to do things and you see their confidence building over the weeks". "It gives them a sense of accomplishment. They love to be able to do things for themselves and reply to messages". "It is helping to bridge the gaps for families by being part of WhatsApp groups". "It is about being able to use technology to do simple things with their

family”. “We are led by what they want to do. A lot of them comment that it’s one-to-one. In bigger groups people can fall behind and that can be difficult for them”. “It helps them tune into the 21st century. They are always so thankful and feel better about themselves”. “They come and think that they don’t have that digital ability. It makes me feel satisfied seeing how the different abilities of learners can be improved”.

Equally volunteers involved in the Care and Repair programme reflected on the difference that they make, “It’s helping people on their own who find getting someone to do the smallest jobs difficult. They appreciate us coming in to change a light bulb or fit a shelf and it’s someone from a trusted organisation”. “A lot of older people are living on their own. There’s a need in the community and people are very grateful for what we do”. “It’s giving a hand to older people to get small jobs done. I get satisfaction from it, and it provides peace of mind for their family members”. “There is an element of social connection which is really important”. “It makes people feel that there is somebody out there who has time for them”.

Quality area 2. Planning for volunteers

People, policies, and procedures have been put in place to ensure volunteering is well-managed

Practice		Met
2.1	There are specific and proportionate systems and processes for volunteer involvement that are regularly reviewed	Yes
2.2	Relevant people in the organisation are aware of systems and processes relating to volunteering and why they are important	Yes
2.3	There are designated people responsible for volunteers and volunteering that have experiences, competencies and attributes for the role	Yes
2.4	Systems are in place to ensure the management of risk, safeguarding, health and wellbeing and protection of volunteers, the organisation, and others	Yes
2.5	There are problem solving procedures to deal with issues raised by or about volunteers	Yes
2.6	Records of volunteer involvement are maintained in line with data protection	Yes

The Volunteer Policy sets out Age Action’s commitment to involving volunteers recognising that they play an essential role in assisting the organisation achieve its goals. The policy details recruitment, selection, training, management and recognition of volunteers. Other volunteer-specific policies such as Support and Supervision and organisational policies such as Data Protection, Confidentiality, Safeguarding and Lone Working are in place to support the management of the volunteering

programme. The National Volunteer Manager said, “The Volunteer Policy was reviewed last October and is due for review every two years”.

Volunteering updates are communicated across the organisation through staff meetings and reporting to the Board. The National Volunteer Manager said, “New staff are required to complete the volunteer training online. Every quarter we have all staff team meetings on Zoom. I present a PowerPoint with volunteer numbers of who applies, how many references received and how many completed training. The numbers of classes and jobs completed are reported and the reviews and feedback. The senior managers report to the Board”.

There are systems in place to manage risks and ensure the safety and wellbeing of volunteers. Safeguarding awareness and Health and Safety are included in the eLearning training modules for volunteers to complete before commencing their volunteering. The National Volunteer Manager said, “Risk assessments are completed on a yearly basis. The dos and don’ts are covered and volunteers are told not to go above and beyond their roles. Volunteers always know that they can come back to us if they have anything to report”.

Volunteers explained areas of their volunteering that are outside of their role, “We are not to do any online banking with the learners”. “It was clearly mentioned to meet only in public places and do not exchange personal contacts”. “It is set out what you can and can’t do. Only use a small step ladder, not to be using an extension ladder”. “There are strict guidelines around making donations and not accepting money”. “You are not to accept money from people; they can make a donation. This is indicated on the form”. “We don’t go near electrics or plumbing. We won’t touch it. Age Action has a list of trusted tradesmen. We go back to Age Action for them to contact them about it”. “We are not to meet learners outside of the sessions”. “The training covered health and safety, any hazards that you might come across and dealing with vulnerable people in their own homes. I was given a safety manual and if there was any issue to call Age Action and run it pass them”. “We had an information session on keeping safe online and banking scams”. “They are very clear on what you are required to do around health and safety and reporting procedures”.

Volunteers also highlighted how their wellbeing was considered, “If you have any concerns, you are to report back to the staff and there is a form to complete if there are any issues”. “I got a phone call from the staff about a situation that came up and was given reassurance by them. They followed that up by checking in with me. I was impressed with the follow-up”. “They are so incredibly supportive and will follow-up by checking in with me”. “Age Action has been very supportive to me when I needed it”. “The support is very good on a number of fronts. The support from staff in the office is great and they encourage you to take time out if you need it”.

Quality area 3. Volunteer inclusion

There is a positive approach to inclusion, equity and diversity and a proactive approach to making volunteering accessible

Practice		Met
3.1	The organisation is inclusive and managed in a way that encourages the involvement of and is welcoming to a wide range of people	Yes
3.2	There is a proactive approach to increasing volunteer diversity, addressing under-representation, and including targeted groups as part of the organisation's inclusion, equity and diversity aims	Yes
3.3	Information about volunteering opportunities is made as widely available as possible using a range of methods and there is active engagement with a diverse range of people	Yes
3.4	Where possible there is a wide range of accessible opportunities that can be adapted throughout the volunteer's journey	Yes

A Volunteer Inclusion Statement sets out Age Action's commitment that its volunteers reflect the diversity of Irish society and ensure organisation-wide inclusive volunteering practices and procedures. Specific actions within the statement to achieve this include providing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training, taking a person-centred approach to volunteering which focuses on the skills and experiences of each volunteer, running targeted recruitment campaigns aimed at volunteers from marginalised communities and offering ongoing additional support for volunteers who may require it. The diversity of Age Action's volunteering team was reflected in the volunteers interviewed. Staff members said, "We are a values-led organisation, and we say that to people. We look after everybody". "We did equality monitoring looking at the demographic of our volunteers and we will be running that again this year". "We work with transition year students by going into schools". Talking about diversity of the volunteering team a staff member said, "We have a wide spectrum of volunteers. There is the social aspect of learning different cultures and sharing experiences".

Age Action carried out a diversity monitoring exercise in 2025 with one of the outcomes being an older age profile within the volunteering team. Staff members said, "We now have a quality of data and are able to analyse that". "We tried a different approach by using StudentVolunteer.ie which was great for applications. We are also looking at more advertising in medical offices or locations where people are retired. We need a mix of people going forward to create a core group of volunteers so that we can then fit in student volunteers". "We have tested Getting Started courses specifically for migrants and looking to target volunteers from a migrant background".

Volunteers indicated ways in which they found out about volunteering opportunities with Age Action, "I wanted to get to know more about the community and saw it on LinkedIn". "I was looking around for volunteering opportunities and saw Age Action in a newsletter that I received from Cork Volunteer Centre". "I found out through I-Vol. I

liked the idea of helping people and being involved in the community”. “I contacted the volunteer centre; they gave me a list of opportunities”. “I saw an article in the local paper looking for IT-savvy volunteers”. “It was on the notice board in my church”.

Both volunteering roles offer a degree of flexibility to accommodate volunteers’ availability and the amount of the time that they wish to commit. Volunteers said, “They send out the next classes and dates on WhatsApp. You say which session you can match to; it is left very flexible”. “What I like about Getting Started is that you can dip in and out of the programme. It fits in very well with my time availability”. “I changed from the Care and Repair as I was travelling too far for this, so I moved to Getting Started”.

Quality area 4. Recruiting and welcoming volunteers

It is easy for people to find out about opportunities, explore whether they are right for them, and get involved

Practice		Met
4.1	People are clear about the opportunities available and the process to become involved	Yes
4.2	Recruitment processes and checks are timely, fair, consistent, straightforward and appropriate	Yes
4.3	Recruitment is a two-way process for volunteers to find out more and that considers how individual and organisational needs can be met	Yes
4.4	Volunteers are provided with any necessary information, introductions and training for their role	Yes

Age Action has developed Volunteer Flowcharts which clearly outline the recruitment process for both volunteering roles. The National Volunteer Manager said, “Our most powerful method is I-Vol. There is a link to apply, and they are requested to fill in an application form from us. Through email we contact references. We request two references for Care and Repair and one for Getting Started. There is a Garda Vetting check required for Care and Repair. Once the references are back, we contact the applicant to complete the training online and then they are added to the system”.

Volunteers talked about the application process and what interested them in volunteering with Age Action, “I went on to the website and completed the application. It was all simple and clear”. “I was interested in computers and was looking for a way to help people. I rang Age Action and signed up”. “I’ve always had a massive love of computers and technology, and this was something that I would really like to do”. “The information on the website was enough to satisfy my initial interest”. “I heard about it through a friend and I thought I could do that”. “I was looking for training for employment. I saw the advert in the library and sent them an email”. “I was aware of the organisation through my previous occupation. I had various skills to offer, and it was a good fit for me”. “I saw they were looking for gardening volunteers on I-Vol”. “The application instructions were all fine and straightforward. They were very helpful

in the office with queries”. “I’ve a background in computing and I enjoy tutoring. It was one of the better fits for me”. “My motivation was wanting to be involved in educating older women in technology”. “I listened to the CEO’s video and could see that they were invested in older people. It sounded like a good cause and I really liked that”. “It’s rewarding meeting people and it gives you a feeling of community spirit”. “I had absolutely no problem with the recruitment process”. “I was given an overview of what was required and I felt confident that I could do it”.

Staff members said, “The induction covers what Age Action does and why we involve volunteers. It includes the volunteer policy and the support and supervision policy, expectations and dos and don’ts”. The induction is specific to the roles and there is a self-assessment for the volunteers to complete”. “We contact them to go through induction and what the role entails”.

Volunteers commented on the induction training, “It answered questions for you that you wouldn’t have thought of”. “You are given a manual to guide you through the role”. “I was able to sit in with one of the other volunteers at the start”. “The training was very good with what was covered and the booklet provided was well put together”. “The online training provided an introduction to the nature of the programme, the different types of learners and the limits of what you can do”. “I completed a couple of online training courses and the manual to work through was provided online. I was happy with the training aspect before I started”. “The online training was very good. It took you through what you needed, and I ended up paired together with another volunteer as a Care and Repair team. The whole process was very beneficial. It brought an expected standard to it”. “The training modules were clear and there are quizzes at the end to test your knowledge”.

Quality area 5. Supporting volunteers

Volunteers feel supported at all times, that they are a part of the organisation and that their contribution makes a difference

Practice		Met
5.1	Volunteers feel appropriately supported in their role and able to discuss all aspects of their volunteering	Yes
5.2	Volunteers and everyone in the organisation who comes into contact with volunteers are clear about the scope of volunteer roles and what volunteers can expect from the organisation	Yes
5.3	Volunteers have the opportunity to discuss how they are doing	Yes
5.4	Volunteers have opportunities to express their views and ideas and to be involved in relevant decision making	Yes
5.5	Volunteers feel there is good communication between themselves and the organisation	Yes
5.6	There are systems for volunteers to have a positive and managed exit	Yes

Staff members talked about how volunteers are supported, “We have created social groups for volunteers to meet for a cup of coffee and a chat. Every month we have online meetings with the volunteers; it is good for them to hear from their peers”. “We meet them at the first class and the last class and check that everything is ok. We check their availability for the next course and give them plenty of notice”. “Development officers have a support and supervision check-in with volunteers twice a year”. “The volunteers can come to us with any issues that they have”. “They know that they can call me – I’m at the end of the phone”. “There is a questionnaire for participants to provide feedback. At the last class learners will be singing the volunteers’ praises. I’ll email the volunteer to give them feedback and let them know”. “At supervision I’ll let the volunteers know the difference that they are making. I’ll ask for ideas and let them know that I got really good feedback”.

Volunteers talked about the support provided, “I know that I can contact the staff with any issues and they will give you feedback”. “The support is there the whole time. The phone lines are open all the time and you can pick up the phone if you have any issues”. “They call in to check on you and if for any reason you need to take a step back you can do so”. “Having a Development Officer assigned to you that you can contact is very supportive. They share happy stories with you of what went well”. “The WhatsApp group keeps me informed and it’s very easy to reach out to the staff for advice and guidance”. “The staff in the office are very easy to chat to”. “The support is everything that I need. They are all very friendly”. “You’re only a phone call away from the office. They are all very affable”. “They are very warm and attentive and always get back to you”. “The check-in with volunteers is great, sending us emails to see if everything is going ok”. “It’s been an amazing experience the way we have been supported”. “They are very supportive. You get information in a timely manner and if you give feedback, they act upon it”.

Age Action encourage volunteers to input to the volunteering programmes and there are ways available for them to do so through the Volunteer Committee, monthly meetings, annual survey and suggestion box in the newsletter. The Board Member said, “There are always opportunities for direct interaction. Communication channels are open to volunteers through the newsletter and for the volunteer committee to put their views across. The last strategic plan was launched with staff, volunteers and the Board. We had round table discussions to listen; it was very positive. The value of face-to-face interaction is important. For our governance code we have to engage with all stakeholders and volunteers of course being one of these”.

Volunteers said, “They are open and receptive to ideas and suggestions”. “We are the people out on the ground. We can tell staff how things are going in practice”. “It’s good to share experiences with staff. They are there to listen to us”. “It’s a two-way street. It’s good for staff to be in contact with volunteers in different areas”.

Quality area 6: Valuing and developing volunteers

Volunteers are valued and there are opportunities for volunteers to develop and grow through their experience

Practice		Met
6.1	Volunteers feel their contribution is meaningful and rewarding	Yes
6.2	Volunteers feel valued by and a part of the organisation	Yes
6.3	The experiences, attributes and competencies that volunteers bring are recognised and they have opportunities to develop them	Yes
6.4	Volunteers have the opportunity for connecting with and learning from other volunteers where appropriate	Yes
6.5	Volunteers' future aspirations are supported where appropriate	Yes

The Board Member and staff mentioned how the organisation recognises its volunteers and the opportunities they have to get together and learn from each other, "During National Volunteer Week 2025 we had an in-person event at the Aviva stadium. We had musicians there and a speech from the CEO. Volunteers came from all over Ireland. It was very meaningful and powerful". "There is the monthly newsletter and thank you emails on a constant basis, and we send hand-written Christmas cards". "We run coffee mornings in the hub in Galway and have musicians there. It is a meeting area for people". "There is a spotlight on volunteers in the monthly newsletter". "The numbers are increasing at the monthly meetings; they are becoming popular. We have a check-in and a chat, get a speaker in and have a Q&A at the end". "Volunteers are engaging with WhatsApp groups. The number of participants showing up at events has increased". "At the monthly sessions we've had speakers in about AI and from the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre". "The volunteers have monthly Zoom meetings. It is a chance to share experiences with their peers". "The spotlight shines on the volunteers' roles in the annual report and on social media".

Volunteers commented on how they felt valued, "The Zoom talks and meetings have been far and away a brilliant innovation". "I like the online meetings chatting with other volunteers and hearing what they are doing in their area". "We are like a family. We get together for a coffee and can discuss things". "They organise monthly talks which I have found interesting". "They keep you updated with changes in technology. We had talks on AI and Canva". "We have our own group of volunteers and are happy to bounce ideas of each other". "I've got some nice Christmas cards from them which is lovely". "I feel connected to the organisation and very much valued. It keeps you going and you want to continue volunteering". "I feel so consistently cared about every time. I am sure that I am appreciated". "The staff are always thanking me and if I needed a reference, I would know who to go to". "I feel valued and listened to. You are thanked on a regular basis".

Volunteers talked about what they got out of their volunteering, "I get great satisfaction of seeing people move on and get enjoyment seeing them gain skills that

they can go on to use". "I get the satisfaction of seeing people leave with a smile on their face. I do it at their pace which gives them confidence and it's a social thing for them". "When I walk out of the class after two hours, I feel that I have done my best". "I simply love it. There is something very rewarding about it". "I enjoy the social interaction and meeting people". "You get a sense of reward sitting with someone and helping to make their life easier". "I'm looking forward to keep on volunteering". "It's keeping me updated with technology with regards to my personal learning". "It has made me more compassionate and understanding. I have learnt a lot about being patient. It has been good for my personal development". "I can put the real-life experience of what I'm learning into my work". "I love it. I get a great buzz out of it". "I am learning a lot about technology from doing this". "It's an empowering feeling for me. It is so gratifying making a contribution to someone's life".

Future plans

Age Action is in the process of developing online Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training for volunteers. The proposed design of the training is that it will be self-paced, take approximately 30 minutes to complete and have a self-assessment element to it. The organisation plan to initially pilot the training to gather feedback from volunteers before rolling this out as an additional online training resource to upskill volunteers on EDI.

Age Action plan to develop a series of short 2-minute videos to highlight the impact that volunteers make through the Care and Repair and Getting Started programmes. The plan is to develop a template that can be readily used to create videos to profile volunteers. These videos will then be posted on a dedicated volunteering page within Age Action's website and on the organisation's social media platforms.

The organisation also plans to explore introducing volunteer awards to celebrate and recognise the contribution that volunteers make to the organisation. The introduction of the awards will be funding dependent, and Age Action will be looking at ways to support this.

Strengths

A number of strengths were identified during the assessment, these are detailed below. The numbers in brackets refer to the quality area and specific practice of the Investing in Volunteers standard.

Demonstrating Age Action's commitment to continuous development from achieving its Investing in Volunteers in 2023, the organisation established a Volunteer Committee to enable volunteers to bring their experience and views to help strengthen the volunteering programme. The committee not only empowers volunteers to bring additions to how the volunteering programme is managed and supported, but it also provides the opportunity for volunteers to extend their volunteering role and increase their personal development. Volunteers are

recruited to sit on the committee for a year after which a new group of volunteers will be recruited to participate. This approach enables more volunteers across the organisation to get involved in the committee and helps bring fresh perspectives to its work.

The CEO said, “The volunteer committee gives them a stake and ownership in the organisation. There is a response from the staff team to what volunteers are suggesting”. The National Volunteer Manager said, “We recruit in October to November for the Volunteer Committee. The meetings are on Zoom. We have terms of reference for the committee. I will chair the first meeting and then volunteers co-chair the meetings. Feedback from the volunteers is brought to the committee and I’ll hear from the committee about their experiences. It was the committee that created the social groups for volunteers around the country”.

Volunteers who had participated on the committee spoke about some of the work that they have carried out, “When I joined the volunteer committee, we reviewed a bunch of documents”. “I went through for the committee and enjoy it as a model to come up with some new developments. We expanded things around the social aspect for volunteers using WhatsApp, having coffee mornings and putting a suggestion box in the newsletter”. “We adopted WhatsApp for communication in the groups and introduced volunteer team leaders. It has improved the group and added structure to it”. “We are strong advocates to bring the voice of volunteers. We are the ones on the ground and it’s the volunteers that know from their interaction with the learners”. **(Supporting volunteers 5.4 and Valuing and developing volunteers 6.3)**

It was evident in talking to volunteers during the assessment that they understood and appreciated the impact that they are making to the lives of older people through the support provided by both volunteering programmes. Volunteers gave many examples of the difference that they were making, “Some learners have a lack of confidence online. By the end of the session, they are happier and more confident and that’s brilliant”. “It’s being there for older people who are willing to step out of their comfort zone”. “I love chatting with them, they are so full of stories and so thankful”. “You make a great connection with them. Having fun while you are doing it enhances the experience”. “You can see that they are a little bit nervous at the first session. You can see that their overall confidence increases by coming into the library and chatting with people”. “It was great to see a learner managing to do their online shopping for the first time”. “Some have smart phones but weren’t using them. Now they have the confidence to do their weekly shopping online”. “The learners are incredibly grateful and it’s such a valuable service as more and more has to be done online”. “It takes away the fear and trepidation of using technology”. “It’s giving them the confidence to organise their photos in folders, book flights online and access government services”. “It’s a really valuable service. I get nothing but good feedback and I feel that I am making a contribution”. “It can be incredibly overwhelming for some about what their device can do. You see the joy on their faces when they can receive videos from grandchildren and they now feel connected”. “They definitely feel more confident doing things that they thought they couldn’t do and it encourages them to

explore things for themselves”. “Without exception everyone gets something out of it. They often rely on a family member; the classes give them independence for themselves”. “Having a phone can be isolating by not being able to make connections. It helps them to get the news on their phone, how to get a bus for transport and using WhatsApp to send messages to family”. “I feel that I am supporting people who are not comfortable with technology”. “There is a big need for it, and we are giving dignity to the people who need the help”. **(Vision for volunteering 1.3 and Valuing and developing volunteers 6.1)**

Both the Care and Repair and Getting Started programmes are enabling volunteers to participate in roles that meet their motivations and aspirations. Volunteers reflected on what their volunteering with Age Action gave back to them, “I’m using my IT skills, and it pushes and challenges me. It keeps me current and sharp”. “I’m meeting people from all walks of life. I find that hugely interesting and that enriches my life”. “I can’t overstate how this has made me feel an active participant in the community”. “I get a lot of feedback from being able to do things that I’ve never been able to do before”. “If I’m asked about something that I’m not familiar with I’ll do a piece of research which enhances my knowledge”. “It’s an opportunity to keep my knowledge fresh and give something back to the community”. “It’s so refreshing. I’m surprised I’ve got so much out of it”. “It was the perfect match for me. I’ve got a huge amount of satisfaction and I haven’t looked back. I have got more involved and made such good friends”. “I love the mixtures of cultures. I’m so happy that I got onboard”. “It keeps my mind active”. “It has given me the confidence to do job interviews”. “I’ve made friends out of volunteering”. “I moved to Ireland and wanted to meet people. It’s been really fulfilling”. “Knowing that I’ve made a difference in someone’s life is tremendous”. “It’s not all one-sided, I am learning as well”. “I get a huge amount of satisfaction from it. You get to give and you get a lot out of it”. **(Valuing and developing volunteers 6.5)**

Continuous development and improvement

Suggestions for continuous development and improvement are offered to help the organisation be even better than it already is in relation to involving volunteers. The adoption of these suggestions and progress against them will be followed up on and more fully explored during the renewal assessment in three years’ time. The numbers in brackets refer to the quality area and specific practice of the Investing in Volunteers standard.

The Board Member and staff commented on the development of a new organisational strategy and how to further volunteer involvement, “Programmes would be impossible to implement without a volunteer base and there is an expectation of that for the new strategy that we are planning”. “We have planning in place for a new phase of the strategy. There is energy in the staff team for volunteering. We are looking to develop an online portal and training for volunteers. We want to develop an app that volunteers can use for efficiency”. The feedback from volunteers is stimulating our work and how we do it – what

services do we want to deliver and to build a team of volunteers around that”. “What are the gaps in services and the added value of volunteers? Care and Repair around hoarding, drawing on a volunteer team trained in mental health. Volunteer teams linked to Care and Repair with time to build relationships.” “There are challenges of building a volunteer base in rural areas and how to sustain numbers”. “We want to run a mobile hub to move to different locations in Cork City and we hope to have volunteers involved”. “There are opportunities to develop volunteer roles for the hub. We are hoping for some in Cork and more in the office”. “There are different needs across the country, and we are in discussion around building the volunteer base and looking at the broader picture of where volunteers can be involved. We are looking at how much the organisation is involving volunteers and having a structured system to allow volunteering to develop. It is important that people are giving their time. What is their experience of volunteering and what support do they need to fulfil their potential”.

It has been encouraging to see the establishment of the Galway Hub from the last assessment and to hear plans for a similar hub in Cork. Equally, the introduction of the Volunteer Committee and monthly volunteer meetings have been a welcome addition to the volunteer programme. General feedback from volunteers during the assessment suggested that the flexibility and expectation of time commitment worked well for them. Some volunteers however expressed that they felt the organisation could do more to fully engage the time that they wanted to offer and this could be a challenge to ensure volunteer retention.

Development: As the organisation works towards developing its new strategic plan there is an opportunity through the Volunteer Committee, monthly Zoom meetings, volunteer support meetings and the consultation process to engage with volunteers to hear their views on how the volunteering programme could continue to be developed in line with the organisational strategy. **(Vision for volunteering 1.1)**